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ARMENIAN STUDIES
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IN MEMORIAM HAÏG BERBÉRIAN

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MORE ON THE MAMIKONIDS AND THE LIPARITIDS

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In an article published some years ago (1) I attempted to establish the community of origin of two important Caucasian dynasties, the Mamikonids and the Liparitids (Orbeliani), or rather the descent of the latter from the former. In this connexion, I felt it warrantable to assume that Stephen Ōrbēlean's «references to the early Liparitids are in actual fact memories of the early Mamikonids» (2) and that Stephen's description of the Liparitid family standard may in reality concern that of the Mamikonids (although, the Liparitids may well have continued to bear the same banner). Our acquaintance with Caucasian heraldry or «proto-heraldry» — that is, the phase of heraldry when devices on flags or on buildings have not yet passed to shields and become systematised — is far from extensive. We do know that flags with inchoate heraldic bearings did exist, but we do not know what these figures actually were; and the only description of a banner that has reached us is precisely that found in Stephen.

Accordingly, the Mamikonid/Liparitid banner was white with a red flame upon it, or, to put it into heraldic terms, argent a flame gules. Stephen states, moreover, that this was the inversion of the royal standard, which was red with a white flame upon it, gules a flame argent. While admitting that the royal standard thus described might have represented an historical reality, I nevertheless thought that it was rather an invention of Stephen's, an inversion of the Mamikonid-/Liparitid reality, produced in order to emphasise the quasi-royal standing of the dynasty. And I proceeded to connect the red flame with

(1) «The Mamikonids and the Liparitids», *Armeniaca*, Venice, 1969, pp. 125-137.

(2) *Ibid.*, p. 133.

the igneous cult of Vahagn as found in Acilisene, which, in Christian times, became a Mamikonid princedom.

G. Widengren's study (3), which appeared more than ten years before my article and which unfortunately was unknown to me, obliges me to revise my opinion. Red and white were from Achaemenian times the royal colours of Iran, combined in both the Great King's robes and his tiara (4). Red was the colour of the warriors, white of the priests (5). And the Great Kings are reported as wearing the white robe of the Magians over the red one, when officiating in religious ceremonies (6). A red banner with a white sacred flame upon it may thus well have existed in Zoroastrian Iran.

At all events, the powerful cultural, institutional, and religious influence of Iran on Armenia is too well known to require comment (7). A manifestation of this, in addition to all that has been adduced in proof of it, is the fact that, as Dio tells us, the royal attire of Tigranes the Great was red and white (8); while P'awstos actually speaks of the identity in colour of the robes of a king of Armenia and a Sassanid Great King (9). That the royal standard of Armenia should have been a replica of that — albeit unknown to us — of Iran, is almost a foregone conclusion. Its Iranian provenance may perhaps be further inferred from the flame, although, to be sure, the Magian religion did flourish in pre-Christian Armenia (10).

Stephen, accordingly, was right in asserting that the Mamikonid-/Liparitid banner was an inverted replica of the royal original — a natural symbol of the greatness of the family of hereditary High Constables. If all this be accepted, we may be said to have, in addition to the proto-heraldic devices of the Arrunids and the P'rošids, also those of the kings of Armenia (and of Iberia?) as well as of the Mamikonids/Liparitids.

(3) G. Widengren, «The Sacral Kingship of Iran», *The Sacral Kingship/ La Regalità Sacra*, Leiden, 1959, pp. 242-257.

(4) *Ibid.* p. 254, as based on Curtius Rufus, 3.3.17.

(5) G. Dumézil, *Rituels indo-européens à Rome*, Paris, 1954, cap. 3-4, as quoted by Widengren.

(6) *The Cave of Treasures*, ed. Bezold, Leipzig, 1883, 58/(1888), p. 238.

(7) Cf. Nina G. Garsoian, «Prolegomena to a Study of Some Iranian Aspects in Arsacid Armenia», *HA* (1976), pp. 177-234; René Grousset, *Histoire d'Arménie*, Paris, 1947, pp. 89, 91, 100, 116-120.

(8) Cassius Dio, 36.52.

(9) P'awstos, 4.16.

(10) Cf. Garsoian, *op. cit.*, p. 181 and n. 36.